

Building Bridges, Inc.: An Evaluation
of a Work Therapy Program
Designed for Juvenile Probationers
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Running Head: Evaluation of a Work Therapy Program

Building Bridges

Introduction

It is estimated that there are 5,200,000 unemployed and underemployed youth in America. While young people comprise only a quarter of the total labor force, this group accounts for nearly half of the unemployed. Today, youth unemployment is considered a top priority concern on a national level. Jobs are often withheld from the young due to their age, their lack of developed skills, and their need for temporary work. (Edelman, 1976) Regardless of the reasons asserted for this very high rate, our economy simply does not absorb young people into the employment arena.

When youth unemployment is placed in a total unemployment context, the result is the creation of what Time magazine recently termed the Underclass: people "who have succumbed to helplessness - a feeling of being beaten." (Time, 1977) Because of a rather pervasive feeling of hopelessness and the accompanying feeling of jealousy and anger, many see a high correlation between youth joblessness and delinquent acting out. After all, employment is generally recognized as an important part of the socialization process necessary for an adolescent to make the successful transition into adulthood. Thus, the inability to obtain a job may stifle this transition, and the feelings of inadequacy may readily turn to hate, followed by criminal behavior.

Others feel that work and vocational training alone do not affect delinquent behavior. Kovacs (1967) found no significant differences in recidivism between the treatment and control groups of 17 to 21 year old parolees in an intensive vocational training program. Robin (1969) found similar negative results in a program where a treatment group of 50 delinquent boys were assigned jobs paying minimum wage and received counseling that encouraged them to stay in school and on the job. (Romig, 1978)

Hackler and Hagan (1966) reported on Seattle's Opportunities For Youth Project where the treatment variables of a supervised work program and the use of teaching machines were studied to see if they modified delinquent behavior. The work component placed boys in city parks and housing projects on Saturdays for one year where supervisors stressed great confidence in the youth to perform as any "normal, nondelinquent" children. The teaching-machine testing program was used two hours a week where a trained teacher instructed the boys to guage rather simple material as to the suitability for classroom use. They were paid the same rate as those in the work group and the impression of being capable, non-criminal youth was also conveyed to this group.

The results in a four year follow-up study found that those boys in the work component got worse than those not exposed to work and that those in the teaching-machine component got slightly

better, although there was no significant difference in recidivism among any of the treatment and control groups. The main reason advanced for the dismal results of the work group was the discontinuance of expected work. "The very success of the work group for the one year period might have raised aspirations for those in the work program more than those in the control group. Although there was some hope that boys who completed the work program might have other opportunities, most of these jobs did not materialize...it is possible that these heightened aspirations led to greater frustration and delinquency." (Hackler and Hagan, 1975)

On a much more positive note, the Hamilton County Juvenile Court's (Cincinnati, Ohio) Work Therapy Program resulted in only three of 170 youth in 1958 being publicly institutionalized. This ten year program focused on two basic problems of children in trouble: the need for self respect and the lack of money. Youth were paid a menial wage (\$1.00 an hour or \$5.00 for working on a Saturday) and organized into supervised work groups performing such community service projects as beautification along the Ohio River, clean up and painting in housing projects and parks, and work with the young and old in hospitals and orphanages.

Shore and Massimo (1973) in a ten year follow-up study of a comprehensive vocational counseling program found that those 15 to

17 year old boys subjected to job placement, remedial education, and psychotherapy did significantly better in overall adjustment and court contacts than the untreated group. Emphasis was placed on providing helping services after job placement to insure keeping the job after getting it. The therapist was very "action-oriented," taking youth to job prospects, court appearances, shopping trips, and recreational outings. The authors caution that "employment by itself does not seem to serve as a deterrent to crime if this employment has no meaning, no status, and no opportunity for learning and personal growth." (Romig, 1978)

The work of Massimo and Shore and Cincinnati's Work Therapy Program bring out another possible dimension of work experience - the role of helping behavior. Paul H. Hahn, former director of the Hamilton County Juvenile Court, stated in regard to their Work Therapy Program, "We purposely picked places where the boys could see crippled children, the handicapped, the very old and sick, people who, if anything, were worse off than they themselves." (Sullivan, 1960) Consequently, the juvenile probationers were not only placed in a compensated work setting, but in a helping situation where the juvenile's typical role of helpee is reversed to that of a helper.

Both Reisman (1965) and Brammer (1973) point out that the persons giving help profit from their role of helper. Actually,

individuals placed in a helper role often benefit as much as the individuals receiving help. The reasons for this phenomena are that the helper undergoes an improved self-image and increased confidence in their ability and self worth. "I must be OK if I can help others in need." (Brammer, 1973) The helping experience often takes the person out of his own world and into the perceptual world of others, thus diminishing concern for his own problems.

Reisman also feels that social work strategists ought to devise ways of creating more helper situations. (Riessman, 1965) A work experience can be designed much like the aforementioned in Cincinnati where youngsters are in the helper role, receiving the therapeutic benefits of both work and the helping process. At the Alton State Hospital in Illinois delinquent youth are released during the day from a state correctional facility to work in a helping relationship with specially chosen mental patients.

There is a dearth of work-related programs directly sponsored by a juvenile court. Most of these programs are restitution programs. The Juvenile Court in Montgomery County, Ohio has developed a "work therapy" program called Building Bridges, Inc. Although the youth in Building Bridges do compensate victims where applicable, as well as pay fines and court costs, it is much broader in scope. Youth earn small amounts of money while at the same time begin to feel better about themselves because the very nature of

the actual work puts them in touch with another segment of the community in great need - the retarded, the hospitalized, the elderly, and the physically impaired.

As in the follow-up studies of Shore and Massimo, Building Bridges places great importance upon the quality of staff. Both paid and volunteer staff are selected because of their unusual dedication, enthusiasm, and energy. University students who often want to "set the world on fire" and need a practicum experience are successfully used. Everyone works under a team probation model where tasks of the professional and volunteer are indistinguishable.

This evaluation will show how using the helping phenomena in conjunction with a therapeutic work experience can be a particularly successful approach in working with delinquent youth.

Program Description

Building Bridges, Inc. came into existence in February, 1974 as an alternative treatment device for the "hard-core" juvenile offender, one who has not responded to traditional probation services by reason of failing to report to his probation counselor, repeatedly violating his rules of probation, and/or continuing to reappear in juvenile court on new charges. These youth have been involved in a work therapy approach where they are paid out of private donation to work in community service projects.

Most work is done in small groups supervised by a probation

counselor or a trained volunteer (most coming from local universities under an internship experience) in which the recipient of the services is the indigent elderly or the disabled. Groups do heavy housecleaning and outside work for the home-bound and recreational type work with those in institutions or group homes. An underlying treatment tenet is that exposure to people in great need, due to being physically handicapped for instance, will cause a greater appreciation of one's own lifestyle and thus cause an accompanying elevation in self concept.

Probationers are paid on a graded pay scale being able to earn a higher hourly wage with increased appearance, dependability, and performance. When the youth have acquired the necessary work habits (nine months being the average stay in Building Bridges), employment in the non-skilled private sector is sought, then followed by their successful termination from probation.

Building Bridges is a tax exempt corporation operating as an arm of the Probation Services department of the Montgomery County Juvenile Court and has a Board of Trustees functioning in an advisory capacity.

Evaluation Design

This evaluation intends to measure delinquent court contacts for two groups of juvenile probationers: a group participating in Building Bridges and a group that is part of the traditional

Probation Services component of the Montgomery County Juvenile Court. Delinquent court contacts were selected as the measurement variable because of the seriousness of charges for the youth's involved in the Building Bridges program and because of the trend to remove status offenders from the court's jurisdiction.

The goal of the study is to compare the effectiveness of Building Bridges with that of Probation Services, using similar "hard-core" juvenile offenders. The study is set up using a "before" and "after" control group research design. The non-parametric median test is used to measure differences between the two groups.

Procedures

The selection time period chosen is between January 1, 1976 and June 30, 1976. During this period there were 25 juveniles participating in Building Bridges and composed the experimental group.

The term "hard-core" is one open to a great deal of interpretation. For the purposes of this study, "hard-core" will be synonymous with "repeat offender", one who has had an average of three delinquent contacts and on probation prior to the evaluation. Therefore, the control group had to include juveniles with the same characteristics as the experimental group, with the only difference being the experimental group's participation in Building

Bridges.

The control group was randomly selected from a list of juvenile probationers with the same frequency of court contacts. The control group had to have had at least three prior delinquent charges before 6-30-76. Age, sex, and race characteristics are also similar to the experimental group. Forty juveniles were selected for the control group.

Table 1 compares the demographic characteristics of the two groups.

Insert Table 1 about here

To further insure that the two groups were as closely matched as possible, a median test was conducted to determine whether or not the median number of delinquent charges prior to any treatment was higher for the control group than for the experimental group (participation in either Building Bridges or Probation Services). The test indicated no difference in the median number of delinquent charges for the two groups.

Analysis

Since the purpose of the study is to determine whether or not Building Bridges significantly reduces the number of court contacts for those juveniles involved in the program, there are two research

questions investigated. The first deals with a comparison of prior and post delinquent charges for the experimental group, and the second concerns the comparison of post charges between the experimental group and the control group.

Comparison of Prior and Post Charges for the Experimental Group

The null hypothesis for the first question was stated as follows: There is no difference between the median number of delinquent charges prior to entering Building Bridges and the median number of charges after exposure to Building Bridges.

Table 2 indicates the number of prior and post charges for the experimental group.

Insert Table 2 about here

The median test was selected to test the null hypothesis with a 95% confidence level.

Table 3 depicts the data cast in the form required for the median test.

Insert Table 3 about here

Since none of the expected frequencies were less than 5, and since $n_1 + n_2 > 20$, the chi square test can be used to test the null

hypothesis. (Siegel, 1956) The decision criteria was to reject the null hypothesis if chi square > 3.84 . The computed value of chi square equaled 13.54; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Consequently, the median number of charges prior to entering the program was significantly higher than after involvement in Building Bridges.

Comparison of Experimental and Control Groups

The above discussion shows that juveniles involved in Building Bridges did not return to court as often as similar youth involved in the traditional probation services department. The question arises as to whether or not the phenomena was due to their involvement in the program or not. Therefore, the following null hypothesis was tested: there is no difference between the median delinquent charges for the control group after being placed on official probation and the median delinquent charges for the experimental group.

The number of post charges for the experimental and control groups is presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Table 5 depicts the data cast in the form required for the median test.

Insert Table 5 about here

Again, a median test using the chi square formula with a 95% confidence level was used to test the null hypothesis. The decision criteria was to reject the null hypothesis if chi square was greater than 3.84. The computed value of chi square was 18.09, therefore rejecting the null hypothesis.

Consequently, the median number of post court contacts for the ~~control group~~ ^{control group} was significantly higher than the post court contacts for the experimental group.

Recidivism Rate

Insert Table 6 about here

As indicated in Table 6, 56% of the juveniles participating in Building Bridges did not return to court at all, while only 10% of the control group did not recidivate.

Insert Table 7 about here

As reflected in Table 7, 12% of the experimental group (three juveniles) were committed to the Ohio Youth Commission during the

evaluation period, while 35% of the control group (14 juveniles) were publicly institutionalized during the same period.

Conclusion

This evaluation clearly indicates that Building Bridges is effective in working with "hard-core" juvenile probationers. The program significantly reduced the number of court contacts participants had after involvement in Building Bridges, as compared to similarly selected probationers who continued to be processed in the more traditional fashion in Probation Services. Interesting was that more than half (56%) of the youth in Building Bridges had no further delinquent contacts with the court after program involvement. That compared to only 10% of the youth continuing in Probation Services. In fact, only one juvenile (4%) in Building Bridges had more than four delinquent contacts after treatment, compared to half (50%) of the youth in Probation Services. Furthermore, of those youth who had to eventually be incarcerated in a public, state institution (the Ohio Youth Commission), only 12% of the youth in Building Bridges necessitated that type of an experience compared to 35% of those in Probation Services.

It was beyond the scope of this study to include other indices of measurement such as attitudinal change, employability, or general social adjustment, i.e. at home, at school, and in the neighborhood. However, a better overall adjustment can be inferred for the youth in Building Bridges simply by reason of

their reduced involvement in the juvenile court by way of delinquent referrals.

The evaluation suggests that the extra involvement youth receive in Building Bridges compared to normal probation handling is significant in reversing the delinquent tide. That involvement exemplifies itself through increased attention from adults, both professional and volunteer, that surrounds a work therapy concept where basic work habits are developed and exposure to unique community service is personally uplifting.

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Experimental & Control Groups

Experimental		Control
Group		Group
N=25		N=40
<hr/>		
Age:		
14	16%	15%
15	20%	25%
16	40%	35%
17	24%	25%
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Sex:		
Male	68%	73%
Female	32%	27%
<hr/>		
Race:		
Black	36%	40%
White	64%	60%
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Table 2

Number of Prior & Post Charges for the Experimental Group

# of Delinquent Charges	# of Juveniles	
	Prior	Post
0	2	14
1	4	6
2	5	2
3	6	1
4	0	1
5	2	0
6	2	0
7	1	0
8	0	0
9	1	0
10	1	0
14	0	1
18	1	0

Table 3

PRIOR & POST DELINQUENT CHARGES FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

	Prior	Post	Total
Juveniles exceeding combined median	19	5	24
Juveniles below combined median	6	20	26
Totals	25	25	50

Table 4
Post Delinquent Charges

No. of Delinquent Charges	<u>No. of Juveniles</u>	
	Control	Experimental
0	4	14
1	2	6
2	5	2
3	3	1
4	6	1
5	4	
6	2	
7	2	
9	2	
10	3	
11	1	
12	1	
14	1	
15	3	
18	1	

Table 5
Post Delinquent Charges for the Control & Experimental Groups

	Control	Experimental	Total
# of juveniles exceeding combined median	26	2	28
# of juveniles below combined median	14	23	37
Total	40	25	

Table 6

Percent of Juveniles Re-entering Court After Treatment

No. of Delinquent Charges	Control	Experimental
0	10.0%	56.0%
1	5.0	24.0
2	12.5	8.0
3	7.5	4.0
4	15.0	4.0
5	10.0	0
6	5.0	0
7	5.0	0
9	5.0	0
10	7.5	0
11	2.5	0
12	2.5	0
14	2.5	4.0
15	7.5	0
18	2.5	0

Table 7
% Committed to OYC

Control	Experimental
35%	12%

NOTE :

the pages in
this document are
misnumbered; but
the text is fine.

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